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**Citation for published version:**

Dawson, J 1995, 'Argyll: The Enduring Heartland', *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 74, pp. 75-98.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25530662>>

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

The Scottish Historical Review

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

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Argyll: The Enduring Heartland

Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Argyll; Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands by K. A. Steer; J. W. M. Bannerman

Review by: Jane E. A. Dawson

*The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 197, Part 1 (Apr., 1995), pp. 75-98

Published by: [Edinburgh University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25530662>

Accessed: 13/12/2013 06:07

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## Review Article

JANE E. A. DAWSON

### Argyll: The Enduring Heartland

*Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Argyll.*

Volume I: *Kintyre*.

Pp. xlv, 233; with 102 photographic plates.

Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. 1971. Out of print.

Volume II: *Lorn*.

Pp. xlviii, 323; with 120 photographic plates.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1975. £45.00.

Volume III: *Mull, Tiree, Coll and Northern Argyll*.

Pp. xlv, 231; with 109 photographic plates.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1980. £52.00.

Volume IV: *Iona*.

Pp. xiv, 292; with over 500 drawings and photographs.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1982. £45.00.

Volume V: *Islay, Jura, Colonsay & Oronsay*.

Pp. xxiv, 373; with numerous drawings and photographs.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1984. £58.00.

Volume VI: *Mid-Argyll & Cowal; Prehistoric & Early Historic Monuments*.

Pp. xxvi, 228; with numerous drawings and photographs.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1988. £57.00.

Volume VII: *Mid-Argyll & Cowal; Medieval & Later Monuments*.

Pp. xxviii, 592; with numerous drawings and photographs.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1992. £120.00.

*Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands.*

By K. A. Steer and J. W. M. Bannerman. Pp. xxvi, 230; with 43 photographic plates.

Edinburgh: RCAHMS. 1977. £35.00.

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JANE E. A. DAWSON is the John Laing Lecturer in the History and Theology of the Reformation at the University of Edinburgh. The title of this article is borrowed from M. Campbell, *Argyll: The Enduring Heartland* (Bath, 1977), which gives a fascinating series of perceptive and evocative pictures of the region. With her own extensive work in history and archaeology, Marion Campbell of Kilberry has helped lead the revival of interest in local historical studies and has been one of the major local contributors to the *Argyll Inventories*.

The crucial importance of regional variations has become a truism in recent historical studies of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis corresponds to a wider pattern. Within European historical writing, the French *Annales* school has been particularly insistent on the need for studies of regions, and for the investigation of the process of slow change over a long period within a defined geographical area; in recent decades, the regional monograph has become a dominant form of historical writing. In England, a very different style of local history emerged, based upon the county record offices and the *Victoria County History*. Nothing comparable has yet taken root in Scotland: although the interest is obviously there, full-scale regional histories have not been produced in any appreciable numbers.<sup>2</sup> This is puzzling because, in some respects, Scotland lends itself far more readily than other parts of the British Isles to a regional approach. In particular, the Highlands and Islands, which cover half the Scottish kingdom, are relatively neglected in most national histories; they have been demoted to the status of a 'mere' region, but have not received a separate coherent history of their own, and still tend to be viewed through the lens of tartan romanticism. However, while Scottish historians have hesitated, an opportunity to change this has been provided in the improbable guise of official government publications. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland has quietly laid the foundations for a new regional history through its *Inventories*. This heartland of the West Highlands and Islands, covered by the volumes under review, could well form the core of a history of the whole Highlands and Islands. And the development from this of properly based regional studies would revolutionise Scottish history.

Earlier generations have seen the appearance of reports on other parts of the Highlands and Islands: Sutherland and Caithness (1911); Skye and the Outer Isles (1928); Orkney and Shetland (1946); and Stirlingshire (1963). Now, the Royal Commission's work has culminated in the seven volumes for the county of Argyll. What these *Inventories* provide are detailed descriptions, in a standard form, of all types of historical sites,

<sup>1</sup> E.g., the late Gordon Donaldson began his Preface to *Reformed by Bishops* (Edinburgh, 1987), 'Almost as far back as I can remember, I have been a strong advocate of local studies, if only on the elementary ground that it is dangerous to generalise and hazardous to pronounce on what was happening throughout the country as a whole unless one knows what was happening in the localities' (*Reformed by Bishops*, p. v).

<sup>2</sup> As well as Donaldson's own work on the Shetland Islands, there have been a number of local and regional studies, particularly for parts of the Highlands and Islands, e.g., F. Shaw, *The Northern and Western Isles of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1980); L. Leneman, *Living in Atholl: A Social History of the Estates, 1685-1785* (Edinburgh, 1986); and for Argyll itself, A. Mackerrall, *Kintyre: A Hidden Past* (Edinburgh, 1988); W. D. Lamont, *The Early History of Islay (500-1726)* (Dundee, 1966); C. M. MacDonald, *A History of Argyll up to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1950); and a range of other smaller local studies. The celebrated volumes of essays produced by the Inverness Field Club deal with Highland history as a whole: L. MacLean (ed.), *Inverness: The Hub of the Highlands* (Inverness, 1975); L. MacLean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981); and L. MacLean (ed.), *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1986). Most recently, a social history of the Highlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been published, T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War* (Manchester, 1994).

monuments and buildings from the prehistoric period to the nineteenth century. These material remains allow archaeologists and historians to piece together details about the history of the region and the life of its peoples. This task would often be impossible without such material because of the dearth of other forms of evidence, especially documentary, for the Highlands and Islands.

With the appearance of the massive volume VII of the Argyll *Inventory* the Royal Commission has completed the magnificent series covering the traditional county of Argyll, which began its publishing life in 1971; and, although officially separate, the monograph by Kenneth Steer and John Bannerman on *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture* should be added to the seven *Inventories*. Together they represent one of the most outstanding achievements of the Royal Commission. It is not one that will ever be repeated, since the Commission, regrettably if understandably, has decided that this publication should be the last of its reports in that particular style. The advent of computer databases and similar technological advances has led it to opt for other formats in which to publish and report upon the wealth of material which they generate.<sup>3</sup> In view of this, it is a relief that at least it remained faithful to the original format throughout the Argyll series, so that the volumes present a unified and coherent whole.

Detailed reviews for the previous volumes of the Argyll *Inventory* can be found in past issues of this journal.<sup>4</sup> But, although here the majority of examples will be taken from volumes VI and VII, devoted to Mid-Argyll and Cowal, the aim of the present article is not simply to provide a specific review of these final two volumes; instead, it offers an assessment of the whole series and of its importance for historians of Scotland. As any such overview is bound to be highly selective, two of the main categories used by the Royal Commission — ecclesiastical monuments and castles — will be employed as case studies.

A vast geographical area lay within the traditional county of Argyll. In the north, it stretches from Tiree and Coll in the west to the Point of Ardnamurchan, through that peninsula to Ardgour, then across Loch Linnhe to Appin and Benderloch. Loch Shiel forms the border with Morvern (Inverness-shire), and the county line then runs through Loch Leven and the Blackwater Reservoir in the east. The county includes Glen Coe and much of Rannoch Moor, and its border with Perthshire lies along the Drum Alban mountain range. It then runs down to the head of Glen Fyne and the Stirlingshire border, and on to Arrochar, where Loch Long divides Argyll from Dumbartonshire. Argyll meets the Firth of Clyde at the Holy Loch. The Cowal peninsula occupies its southern part, but the islands of Bute and Arran are outwith its boundaries. The Mid-Argyll area around Loch Fyne links with Lorn and the whole of the western coast of the mainland, running down from Oban past the Crinan Canal, Knapdale and finally to the Kintyre peninsula. All the southern Hebrides are within Argyll, from Gigha to Islay, Jura and Colonsay, and

<sup>3</sup> E.g., *North-East Perth* and *South-East Perth* (HMSO, 1990, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> *Ante*, lii (1973), pp. 75–8; *ante*, lv (1976), pp. 64–8; *ante*, lxi (1982), pp. 176–9; *ante*, lxii (1982), pp. 163–5; *ante*, lxvi (1987), pp. 66–8.

back up to Mull and Iona and the little islands off the Firth of Lorn — which brings us back to the starting point at Tiree, with only the Atlantic Ocean and America out to the west.

As the opening sections of the various Introductions demonstrate, there are significant differences between the geology and topography of the areas of Argyll covered by the different volumes. The sand-dunes and the machair on islands such as Islay and Tiree make their natural environment closer to the Outer Hebrides. This contrasts strongly with the mountainous terrain of eastern Ardnamurchan and that of north-eastern Lorn, on the end of the Grampian chain. Most of the Argyll lochs are open to the sea, but the large inland lochs, such as Loch Awe, Loch Shiel and Loch Eck provide a different type of environmental setting. The characteristics of the Kintyre and Cowal peninsulas are equally diverse. As a whole, the climate is relatively mild and wet, though there are some significant variations in rainfall. Much more important is the height of the ground above sea level, for those parts of the region with high mountain ranges endure a near-arctic climate. All of Argyll shares the problem that there is little land available with a reasonable, let alone a high, agricultural capacity.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the human settlement has always been found on the coastline or by the lochs. This underlines the crucial importance of water transport throughout the centuries. It has meant that there have been vital links between Argyll and other areas which lie just across the sea-borders. Ayrshire and the whole of the Clyde estuary are the neighbours for Cowal, Mid-Argyll and Kintyre. It is regrettable, though understandable because of the county boundaries, that the islands of Arran and Bute lie outside this survey, as they so obviously form part of the same region. The short crossing between Kintyre or Islay and the coast of Antrim means that links across the North Channel to Ireland and the Isle of Man were of great significance, most obviously in the Dalriadic period and during the era of the Lordship of the Isles. The Outer Hebrides were also part of that great medieval lordship, while northern Argyll, Mull, Coll and Tiree had very strong bonds with Skye and the Outer Isles. The Viking period demonstrates the way in which the sea could shorten distances: Argyll then found itself on the great western route connecting Scandinavia, Iceland and the Northern Isles with Ireland, the Isle of Man and the western mainland of Britain.

Although the sea was of immense importance to Argyll, the region faces east as well as west. The borders with Perthshire and Inverness-shire seem to have little historical significance; the Highland/Lowland Fault Line provides a more obvious divide than the old county line with Stirlingshire and Dumbartonshire. But, despite these caveats, the old county boundaries of Argyll do offer an extremely good basis for a regional history. As the current disputes over local government changes demonstrate, no boundaries will satisfy everyone and anomalies will remain or be created. Many documentary records are classified according to central and local government boundaries, or according to property divisions, while the Church operates a separate system of parishes,

<sup>5</sup> As shown on the soil and land capability maps produced by the Soil Survey of Scotland (The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, Aberdeen).

presbyteries or dioceses. Areas of cultural, linguistic or economic influence rarely have neat or straightforward boundaries.

When examining any region, historians always have to make decisions and compromises, depending upon the criteria which are most important for their study. Although flexibility is vital, it is usually essential to have a recognisable central core. Such a core has been provided for Argyll by the resources contained in the *Inventory*. It incorporates both its main concern with material evidence and a documentary base. It also offers a chronological survey, through the monuments, from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century. This is the essential backbone needed for any regional history.

Argyll has the foundations upon which so much else can be built. The region's enthusiastic archaeological and historical societies, together with many equally enthusiastic individuals, have already begun their constructions. But there is also an opportunity for professional historians to produce the kind of high class regional study which is common on the Continent and so rare within the British Isles. It is to be hoped that any such study would be the product of the same co-operation with the local bodies which was such a marked feature of the *Inventory* itself. With the aid of the now-completed Reports, Argyll's history can become the foundation for a new approach to the study of the whole Highlands and Islands which would be fully incorporated into Scottish history.

Within the Argyll Reports, two volumes are distinct: the thematic treatment of *Monumental Sculpture*, and the monograph-style volume IV, which deals solely with Iona. The other parts are each devoted to a separate geographical area. The amount of material for Mid-Argyll and Cowal meant that this area was split into two, along chronological lines: *Prehistoric and Early Historic Monuments* (vol. VI), and *Medieval and Later Monuments* (vol. VII). Sometimes the geographical coverage is not fully apparent from the short title. For example, volume V includes the southern islands of the Firth of Lorn, Scarba, Lunga and the Garvellachs, in addition to Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay, which are mentioned in the title; whereas their neighbours, Seil, Luing and Shuna are found in the second volume (*Lorn*).

Each of the area volumes covers all the different types of monument, grouping them in general categories. For the prehistoric and early periods these include forts, chambered cairns, burials and cists, duns and crannogs, standing stones, and a variety of other structures and settlements. The later periods are represented by ecclesiastical monuments, castles and fortifications, industrial and transport monuments, and domestic architecture, farms and shielings. In addition, armorials and glossaries are appended. All entries, even those which are only probable sites, are given a number and description, and either plans or photographs or frequently both.

In any project of this size, taking thirty years to complete, there will always be slight inconsistencies or disagreements about the details of particular entries and classifications. Some broadly comparable monuments, for example, seem to enjoy considerably longer entries than others — particularly in the later volumes — though this is usually to be welcomed. The dating of the occupation and use of the duns usually errs on the side



of caution, and such conservatism has the effect of undervaluing some important continuities in the region's history.

Equally, there were bound to be changes to the conditions of the monuments as recorded in the surveys, which were conducted over such a protracted period. One of the greatest transformations is to be found at Breachacha Castle on Coll. In volume III, the shell of the castle is minutely described and photographed (iii, 177–84, no. 208). Today, the castle is the comfortable home of the Maclean-Bristols who, over the years, have painstakingly restored it to its present condition. Although not producing the same striking 'before' and 'after' pictures, the information contained in the *Inventories* has also been superseded by recent work on other specific items. In particular, the excavations at Finlaggan, the centre of the Lordship of the Isles, are probably the most important of the works in progress; they will eventually produce a report of major historical significance which will supersede the entry in the *Inventories* (v, 275–81, no. 404).<sup>6</sup> In general, the increase in knowledge about the monuments gained from archaeological and other research projects means that individual copies of the *Inventories* will have to be updated by their owners. But it will be a very long time indeed before the Report as a whole becomes, in any sense, redundant.

The amount of local interest and work on individual sites within Argyll is one of the greatest tributes to the success of the series, and it is a clear indication that the Argyll *Inventories* has laid the foundations for a proper regional history. As their acknowledgements in the reports reveal, the staff at the Commission have been assisted by a veritable army of people who have provided access to sites, additional information, and help of all kinds. Behind the imposing, impersonal facade of an official publication lies a magnificent co-operative effort, which has brought together central and local, professional and amateur, expertise. As the volumes of the series were published, they helped to stimulate interest in Argyll itself and produced a number of local projects whose results have subsequently been incorporated into the *Inventories*. The close relationship which has built up over the years, to the mutual benefit of the Royal Commission and the local archaeological and historical societies of Argyll, is a model of how such liaison should work.

The surveys of the items were conducted on numerous field trips by the executive staff at the Royal Commission during a period of over thirty years. These trips could present real difficulties for the staff, whose full reports give scarcely a hint of the hazards which they encountered — for example, when trying to land in rough seas from a small boat at locations such as the Treshnish Isles. If fully related, the 'Tales of the Argyll Commissioners' would indeed read like an adventure story! The care and the attention to detail with which the fieldwork was conducted throughout the whole project are extremely impressive. Inscriptions have been recorded, precise measurements made, and abundant scale drawings provided of all the unusual features, while the date on which the item was last examined is always stated. A map, locating every item, is appended to each volume, and National Grid references are supplied at the start of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. D. H. Caldwell and G. Ewart, 'Finlaggan and the Lordship of the Isles: an archaeological approach', *ante*, lxxii (1993).



each entry. It is a pity that the large maps of the areas covered by each volume, which were included as endpapers in volumes I–III, were subsequently replaced by map sections printed on consecutive pages and bound into the later volumes. Though the earlier, loose, maps were no doubt a librarian's nightmare, frequently being lost or stolen, they did make it easier to form a general impression of the distribution of the monuments across the area and to locate individual sites. The use of colour-coding or different symbols for the various categories of monuments might have improved these general maps, which can be rather difficult to use.

The decision to retain the mapping style adopted at the outset was probably one example of the tension between keeping a consistent format throughout the series and using the advances in printing technology to improve the later volumes. Another editorial change certainly assists the reader: the decision after volume III to move the photographs from the end of the book and integrate them into the text. The standard of the photography throughout has been high, and the later volumes in particular have benefited from superior reproduction of the plates. By volume VII, the visual image of the monument is provided wherever feasible, and this has tended to reduce the number of beautiful plans, elevations, diagrams and scale drawings which grace the earlier volumes. The Introductions have grown longer and more detailed as the series has progressed. They could, perhaps, have usefully been made even longer still, to offer more analysis of the significance of the material — though this, it must also be recalled, was not included in the Commission's original remit for its reports to the Crown.

In addition to the precise and detailed descriptions of each item as it can be viewed on the ground, the *Inventories* include considerable discussion of the historical background. This forms part of the item entries, appearing as separate summaries at the end of the detailed descriptions for the more significant sites; and, in addition, the Introductions contain more general comments. But much more is hidden away in the extensive footnotes, which are a treasure-trove of information as well as containing numerous interesting references. They reveal the comprehensive way in which the written record has been examined to build up the fullest possible picture of each monument; and, also, they indicate many helpful comparisons between monuments in Argyll and those in other parts of Scotland and often in Ireland. For example, the Introduction to volume VII (p. 21) points out that Carrick Castle in Cowal is similar in its overall proportions both to Dundonald Castle in Ayrshire, as rebuilt in the 1370s, and to the Irish 'hall-keeps' of the later thirteenth century. A similar range of comparisons are used in the description of the early Christian cross at Keills, Knapdale, especially in identifying the carving as one of St Michael rather than of St John, as had earlier been suggested (vii, 87, no. 45[1]). The reader is also given a useful reference to the cult of St Michael in Ireland (vii, 543, note 11). The following note, moreover, compares the Keills Cross Daniel and his adoring lion with continental models, which in turn had been influenced by the iconography of camels adoring the Egyptian St Menas (vii, 543, note 12).

The region's central place in the development of Scottish Christianity is underlined by the *Inventories*. Argyll contains the majority of Scotland's

early Christian settlements, including the most celebrated one at Iona. The Commission decided to devote an entire volume (IV) to Iona's early medieval and later monuments, and it stands as a monograph in its own right on that island's ecclesiastical importance from the time of St Columba to the disappearance of the monastery at the Reformation and beyond. Other important early Christian sites can be found in the area volumes: for example, the pre-Norse monastery with its distinctive stone-roofed, double beehive cell, and St Eithne's (St Columba's mother) Grave at Eilach-an-Naoimh (v, 170–82, no. 354).

The early Christian sculptured stones which are widely found throughout Argyll are meticulously described, drawn and (where feasible) photographed. There are comparative outlines of the famous crosses of St Martin, St John and St Oran on Iona, the Kilnave and Kildalton Crosses on Islay and the Keills Cross in Mid-Argyll (v, 28). Spectacular and beautiful as these free-standing crosses are, the less eye-catching slabs with cross markings, such as the stone at Ardrishaig (vii, 49, no. 8) or that in the burial ground of the chapel at Killundine, Mull (iii, 149–50, no. 303), are of greater importance for constructing the overall picture of Christian activity in the Dark Ages. Patterns of influence and development within Argyll can be traced through the distribution maps of the early Christian monuments and the useful comparative plans of early chapels (v, 26; vii, 4, 6), though the acute problems of dating and classification they present have been highlighted rather than solved by recent surveys and excavations (vii, 3–10).

For the sculptured stones of the late medieval period the task of interpreting the evidence found throughout the series has been greatly simplified by the splendid thematic volume written by Kenneth Steer and John Bannerman. As they explain in their introduction, the authors were primarily interested in dating and classification (*Monumental Sculpture*, 5), but they have achieved a great deal more than these modest goals. The full listing of the stones is to be found in the *Inventories*, which must be consulted alongside the Steer and Bannerman monograph. This necessitates some cumbersome cross-referencing, but the amount of important material which it yields makes the effort eminently worthwhile. Together the volumes are the most important and detailed surviving source for late medieval dress, armour and weaponry, tools and other domestic objects. Through the inscriptions, which Bannerman has skilfully deciphered and exhaustively commented upon, a whole range of additional material concerning the upper levels of Gaelic society has been made available. The vast amount of genealogical information, including many meticulously researched family trees, which can be extracted from the section dealing with the inscriptions is truly remarkable.

The sculptured crosses and gravestones are an extremely important key to the activities of the late medieval Church, and constitute a barometer of religious attitudes throughout the West Highlands during the age of the Lordship of the Isles. The temporal and spiritual leaders of Gaelic society commissioned them from the skilled masons, who can be grouped into five main schools of carving. The quantity and high artistic standards of the monumental sculpture reveal that the cult of the dead, which was a prominent feature of late medieval European society, was also to be found throughout the West Highlands. And the disappearance

of the sculptured stones around the middle of the sixteenth century is particularly significant: it demonstrates an important shift in attitude at the time of the Reformation towards those funerary customs associated with the practice of prayers for the dead, which were henceforth to be condemned as 'popish'.

The sculptured stones also reveal many details of life in Gaelic Scotland during the later Middle Ages. In the religious sphere they portray West Highland ecclesiastical dress and illustrate distinctive stylistic features, particularly on the eucharistic vestments (*Monumental Sculpture*, 31), which would otherwise be unknown. The tau-headed staff carved on a tomb in Lismore (*Monumental Sculpture*, plate 42B) was known in the Celtic Church and continued to be used in the Greek and Coptic Churches, but its presence in the West Highlands at this point is remarkable (*Monumental Sculpture*, 177–9). Personal details about the clergy can be gleaned from the inscriptions and the accompanying extensive commentaries. These present a unique picture of the clerics who manned the upper echelons of the secular and monastic ecclesiastical establishments during the period of the Lordship of the Isles.

The stones provide information about the individuals and their connections, as well as revealing their tastes and demonstrating their relative wealth. Abbot Finguine MacKinnon of Iona and his sons Finguine and Aed erected a fine carved cross at Kirkapoll, Tiree, probably at the end of the fourteenth century. The abbot's chequered career and dubious reputation are carefully documented (*Monumental Sculpture*, 100–2, plate 16C), and the cross is described both under Tiree (iii, 156, no. 310[3], plate 29B) and also under its present location at Inveraray Castle (vii, 80, no. 38). It is clear that Abbot Finguine had not only failed to keep his vow of celibacy but was perfectly happy to advertise the fact by placing his sons' names on the memorial cross at Kirkapoll. Finguine and Aed seem to have followed their father into holy orders and probably became monks at Iona. Another Finguine, the grandson, was also a monk there in 1444. The existence of such clerical dynasties was extremely common and not in itself a cause for adverse comment in West Highland and Irish society at this period. The black reputation of 'Green Abbot Finnon' and his relatives comes from his enemies, and rests primarily upon his rebellion of c.1387–95 against John, Lord of the Isles. MacKinnon's overt use of the wealth of the monastery of Iona to maintain and dower his noble concubine and children also provoked complaints to Rome. However, this did not prevent the MacKinnon connection with Iona as abbots, priors and lay administrators continuing into the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Though few West Highland clerical dynasties were as colourful as the MacKinnons, details of the lives of many other clergymen and of the leading members of the major clans and kindreds can be traced through the pages of *Monumental Sculpture* and the *Argyll Inventories*. When it is added to the vast quantity of similar biographical and historical information to be found in the exemplary edition by Jean and R. W. Munro of

<sup>7</sup> A. Macquarrie 'Kings, lords and abbots: power and patronage at the medieval monastery of Iona', *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, liv (1984–8).

the *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*,<sup>8</sup> it becomes possible to piece together much of the ecclesiastical, social, and political life of the Lordship of the Isles. Historians of Scotland owe an enormous debt to all of these scholars for making so much of the available evidence on the West Highlands and Islands readily accessible.

The buildings and sites of Argyll's parish churches and chapels make up the majority of entries for ecclesiastical monuments found throughout the *Inventories*. These buildings provide some of the best extant evidence for medieval and early modern religious life, periods when documentary material is exiguous. Little remains of the early medieval ecclesiastical buildings, which tended to be constructed of perishable materials or were subsequently so extensively reconstructed as to leave few traces of the originals. One revelation is the interesting variation in the chronology of building stone churches and chapels, with Kintyre and Knapdale leading the way in the twelfth century; most of the remainder of the county followed more slowly in the thirteenth century, while northern Argyll delayed for a further hundred years. The provision of comparative plans of the churches facilitates detailed comparisons of their size, style and layout (i, 23, fig. 7; ii, 24, fig. 6; iii, 31, fig. 6; v, 33; vii, 11). Most are of a simple, oblong, unicameral type and are small in comparison with Lowland churches, though larger than many of those found in the northern Highlands.

Although the legal and institutional difference between a parish church and a dependent chapel was clear, in practice the distinction could be irrelevant. Many of the chapels were indistinguishable in function from a full parish church. For example, both Pennygowan in Mull (iii, 160–2, no. 320) and Strachur in Cowal (vii, 205–8, no. 101) were of quasi-parochial status during the medieval period. With only a couple of parishes covering the whole island, the people of Islay were forced to rely upon a series of dependent chapels to serve their religious needs. This meant that the chapel building at Nereabolls in the parish of Kilchoman, Islay, was almost as large as the neighbouring parish church at Kildalton. Its importance to the community is further demonstrated by the large array of outstanding funerary monuments together with a free-standing cross (v, 228–30, no. 384).

The final group of ecclesiastical monuments covered by the *Inventories* are in some ways the most tantalising. These are the many burial grounds which are quite separate from the church buildings used for worship. There is sometimes evidence that a chapel had previously existed on the site, but more often this is lacking. Occasionally, when there are no identifiable remains at all, the entry is only able to note a site which was traditionally held to be a burial ground (e.g., Kilbride, Loch Fyne: vii, 100, no. 51). When gravestones can be dated, they are frequently of a late period, such as the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Despite the employment of considerable ingenuity and expertise in studying, for example, the changing shape of enclosure walls for old burial grounds, dating these sites is usually impossible. This leaves the ecclesiastical historian puzzling over the precise role and significance of the separate

<sup>8</sup> *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336–1493*, ed. J. Munro and R. W. Munro (Scot. Hist. Soc., 1986).

burial grounds from the medieval period through to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries when many fell into disuse.

One problem in reconstructing Argyll parish life is that many churches and chapels are in ruins, with little more than the footings of the buildings being still in view. The Commission has done a valiant job in extracting as much architectural information as possible from what does survive, but in many instances they cannot supply descriptions of the interiors, the windows or even the building's overall size. The lack of continuity of occupation means that very few church furnishings of any kind have survived. Being made of stone, some fonts remain *in situ* or have been preserved elsewhere. The fine late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century font from Kilmorich Church, Clachan, Glen Fyne, decorated with a drawing of a galley, was actually rediscovered during the Royal Commission's survey of the north-east terrace at Inveraray Castle, and was subsequently placed in the church at Cairndow (vii, 158, no. 74). The lack of material evidence underlines the immense importance of the details furnished by the carvings on the sculptured stones. Interesting features, once more preserved in stone, are the incised sundials or 'mass clocks' at Kilninian, Mull (iii, 151, no. 306[9] and fig. 182), and on the bases of the standing crosses at Iona, Oronsay and Kilberry (iv, 240, no. 6[227]; v, 252, no. 386[32]; vii, 97–8, no. 48[14]).

The 'sheela-na-gig' or female fertility figures inserted into the church walls at Muckairn, Taynult and the Nunnery on Iona are more surprising (ii, 165, no. 269 and plate 35E; iv, 22 and plates 174B, 175). A similar statue can be seen on Harris at St Clement's church, Rodel, and there are numerous examples in Ireland. There was no attempt to hide these exhibitionist carvings of the female figure, though they are placed on the external walls of the churches and are not furnished with canopies or proper niches which distinguished the statues of saints. The outer wall of the church on Luìng was put to a rather different use. It retains the graffiti carved into it by medieval children who were clearly obsessed with drawing West Highland galleys, the best racers of their day (ii, 144–5, no. 256, figs. 132–4).

Considering its early Christian tradition, later medieval Argyll boasted few monastic foundations. The short list is headed by Iona which contained a convent of Augustinian nuns, together with the Benedictine monks at the abbey (iv, 49–179, nos. 4, 5), who had gained control of the island's monastic life at the start of the thirteenth century. Iona Abbey had strong links with Oronsay's small Augustinian priory, which had been founded in the second quarter of the fourteenth century (v, 230–54, no. 386).<sup>9</sup> Saddell Abbey in Kintyre (i, 140–5, no. 296) housed Cistercians from the third quarter of the twelfth century. Ardchattan in Lorn (ii, 99–105, no. 217) was established in 1230 as one of the three Valliscaulian houses in Scotland, alongside Beaulieu in Inverness-shire and Pluscarden in Moray. Most foundations were originally associated with the Lords of the Isles, but by the sixteenth century the religious houses had come to be dominated by local kindreds: Oronsay was controlled by the MacDuffies; Iona, after the decline of the MacKinnons, was largely run by the

<sup>9</sup> See also *Monumental Sculpture*, Appendix II, 'The Foundation of the Oronsay Priory', 215.

MacLeans; and Ardchattan was under the MacDougalls and the Campbells. The only collegiate church in the area was that founded at Kilmun in Cowal (vii, 174–86, no. 80) by Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochawe in 1442. It is quite remarkable that the friars had no houses in the western Highlands, especially in the later medieval period following the arrival of the Observant Movement.

Protestant opposition to the monastic ideal ensured that the religious life of the monasteries came to an end after the Reformation in 1560. With the single exception of Ardchattan, the monastic churches were not subsequently used for congregational worship, and were allowed to fall into ruins. These fine buildings were reduced to their present state by neglect and the lure of good building stone, rather than by the kind of deliberate iconoclasm which had taken place in other parts of Scotland. Thanks to its suppression by James IV, Saddell had ceased to function by the start of the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, the local kindreds who had earlier gained control simply took over the properties at the Reformation, and often turned them into patrimonies for new cadet branches, such as that established out of the revenues and property of the monastery by the Campbells of Ardchattan.

The Reformation also launched an extended process of change for Argyll's parish churches. Many medieval churches had been located on holy sites associated with Celtic saints. Their eremitical quest for the 'desert' drove these saints to small islands off the seashore or in the middle of a loch, such as St Finan's Isle on Loch Shiel, Inishail on Loch Awe, or the penitential cell on Eilean Mor in the Macormac Isles at the end of Loch Sween.<sup>11</sup> It sometimes seems as if the sanctity of the site was in direct proportion to its inaccessibility! The location of parish churches assumed a new importance at the Reformation. Protestant theory laid down that it was essential that parishioners be able to attend Sunday service every week. It was also important to dissociate the place of worship from the cult of saints, which was rejected by Protestantism. These two factors caused a relocation of a significant number of Argyll's churches, which were now positioned according to the distribution of the population rather than to the holiness of the original site. What might have been clear enough in theory, however, was extremely difficult to achieve in practice.<sup>12</sup> Also, when the original site of the church did remain suitable, the interior of the post-Reformation churches needed to be reconstructed to reflect the central location now accorded to the pulpit, and to provide adequate seating for those listening to the sermon — as illustrated by the different stages in the building of the parish church at Lochgoilhead, (vii, 191–8, no. 87).

The cost of relocating or rebuilding the parish churches ensured that it

<sup>10</sup> N. Macdougall, *James IV* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 216; A. L. Brown, 'The Cistercian Abbey of Saddell, Kintyre', *Innes Rev.*, xx (1969).

<sup>11</sup> Later visitors to the cave, known as 'Macoharmaig's study', were traditionally supposed to run the risk of becoming sterile (vii, 66–74, no. 33, 68–9, and 452, note 11).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., the ambitious plans made by the synod of Argyll in the middle of the seventeenth century, most of which could not be implemented for lack of funds: *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll, 1639–61*, ed. D. MacTavish *et al.* (Scot. Hist. Soc., 1943–4), i, 49–59, 227–54; ii, 68–73.



was the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before real progress was made. The necessary funding was often provided by local landowners. There are some beautiful examples of this *genre*, such as the delightful octagonal church at Dalmally, Lorn, opened in 1811 and paid for by the fourth earl of Breadalbane (ii, 132–4, no. 246). Killarrow Church, Bowmore, Islay, was built in 1767 on a remarkable circular plan supported by a massive central pillar (v, 189–93, no. 360). In the 1820s, money voted by Parliament was used to build the so-called ‘parliamentary churches’. These usually adhered to the T-plan design of James Smith, Thomas Telford’s pupil, as seen at Portnahaven, Islay (v, 256–7, no. 388), Duror and Muckairn in Lorn (ii, 129, 163–5, nos. 244, 269), and Acharacle and Ulva in northern Argyll (iii, 123, 170, nos. 254, 331). In the six Mid-Argyll parishes, only one church remained on its original site, though in Cowal six out of the nine parishes enjoyed continuity (vii, 15). As a result of all these efforts, the majority of the medieval churches were either abandoned and are now in ruins; or, where the location has remained constant, the original churches have been completely rebuilt.

The destruction of so much of the material evidence of Argyll’s religious life during the medieval and early modern periods is a double blow to the ecclesiastical historian who is faced with a similar lack of documentary sources.<sup>13</sup> Recovering the nature of religious practice in the region is a slow and painful process, which relies upon bringing together as many pieces of the jigsaw as can be found. The sculptured stones are an invaluable source, and much can be learned even from church ruins. This is almost entirely due to the persistence of the Commission’s staff when they surveyed the ecclesiastical monuments. They managed to make architectural sense of disordered lumps of masonry, they cleared away ivy to reveal hidden features, they deciphered nearly illegible inscriptions. In general their eagle eyes seemed to have missed nothing. Through their work they have furnished historians with all the small clues which together make at least a partial picture of the religious life of Argyll.

From prehistoric times through to the Dalriadic period and down to the twelfth century, the peoples and rulers of Argyll had occupied crannogs, forts and duns throughout the county. The continuity of occupation on some of these sites was remarkable, and, as so few have been properly excavated, there is much more to be learned about the way in which such centres of power were used. The chronological division of the Mid-Argyll and Cowal area means that volume VI is entirely devoted to prehistoric and early medieval monuments. It shows at a glance how much material there is for the area, as well as dealing in detail with the famous Kilmartin valley which boasts the richest concentration of prehistoric monuments within Scotland (see vi, 12–13, map vi). It also contains Dunadd, the centre of the kingdom of Dál Riata, where excavations have uncovered many artefacts which provide a detailed picture of social and cultural life

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., I. B. Cowan, ‘The Medieval Church in Argyll and the Isles’, *Recs. Scot. Church Hist. Soc.*, xx (1978–80); and G. W. S. Barrow, ‘The Sources for the History of the Highlands in the Middle Ages’, in MacLean, *Middle Ages in the Highlands*. With the advent of the database *Inventory of Churches in Scotland*, which is run under the auspices of Historic Scotland, it will be possible to gather and compare information for the whole of the Highlands and Islands.



in the seventh and eighth centuries. The finds from these spectacular sites can be added to the meticulous evidence collected from the more prosaic, but no less important, monuments found in other parts of Argyll, recorded in the other volumes; these include photographs and detailed lists of Bronze Age pottery and metalwork (i, 13–15; ii, 14–15; iii, 14–16; v, 15–19; vi, 21–7). They reveal broad trends such as the retreat from settlements in the interior of Argyll occupied in the Late Bronze Age to the coastal sites favoured in the Iron Age (iii, 12).

One immediate surprise is the small quantity of Norse artefacts found in Argyll. Since large parts of the region were under the Norwegian crown until the thirteenth century, it has been assumed that the Vikings and their descendants had settled extensively throughout Argyll from the ninth century onwards. The southern islands of Islay, Colonsay and Oronsay show evidence of Norse occupation from the early ninth or tenth century: the eleven sites containing Viking burials in the sand-hill areas of these islands (v, 29–32, 147–53, nos. 292–302) have produced a fine set of scales and weights (Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, v, 30, 150–1, no. 298) and an interesting pair of silver brooches with a silver wire chain (Ballinaby, Islay, v, 31, 147–9, no. 293[2]). Elsewhere in Argyll, however, the few burials which have been discovered have produced little material evidence of prolonged domestic occupation (i, 21, 97, no. 245; ii, 22; iii, 29, 118–19, nos. 234–6). The place-names of the islands reveal a strong Norse influence, but only on Islay is this frequently connected to farms or settlement sites as opposed to the naming of natural features in the landscape, such as bays or headlands. Even linguistic evidence of settlement is lacking in Mid-Argyll (vi, 35–6), despite the broad sea highway of Loch Fyne which joins this area to the Firth of Clyde and the North Channel. The lack of artefacts, or even of place-names, within Argyll stands in sharp contrast to the Outer Hebrides and, most obviously, to the Northern Isles of Scotland. This raises the intriguing problems of the real extent of permanent Viking settlement within Argyll, and of whether the area was ever fully integrated into Scandinavian Scotland.

In Argyll, castles and fortified houses can be found in all shapes and sizes, spreading across the whole chronological range. Other buildings which were made of perishable materials have not survived, though there is evidence that some of the duns, forts and crannogs of earlier periods remained in use until comparatively late.<sup>14</sup> This can create problems in dating the remains — as the Commission found with the ‘Robber’s Den’ at Ardrishaig, where they concluded that the ditch and surviving buildings can only be ascribed to the sixteenth or seventeenth century (vii, 296–7, no. 138). Similar difficulties were encountered with the fortification at Dùn an Garbh-sràine above Asknish Bay. It does not conform to any common type of Scottish medieval fortification, though there are similarities in the layout to some enclosed strongholds in Lorn; but documentary evidence gleaned from the *History of the Campbells of Craignish* and the *Argyll Sasines* (vii, 552, note 5)<sup>15</sup> indicated that the site

<sup>14</sup> I am most grateful to Alastair Campbell of Airds for his helpful comments on this point, and for the interesting discussion in ‘Centres of Power in the West Highlands and Islands’, a paper given to the Coll Conference, May 1993.

<sup>15</sup> ‘The manuscript history of Craignish, by Alexander Campbell’, ed. H. Campbell, *Scottish History Society Miscellany Four* (1926), 218–9, 242, 261–4, 273–5, 286, 291;

was probably occupied by the MacIver Campbells from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century (vii, 263, no. 124).<sup>16</sup>

Continued occupation or re-use of old sites was common for the smaller types of fortified building, though only about a tenth of the larger castles stood on a prehistoric site. MacEwan's Castle at the end of Kilfinan Bay stood on a prehistoric dun: excavations in 1968–9 revealed a group of medieval or later buildings, and unearthed a Romanesque crucifix and a James I groat (vi, 195–6, no. 324; vii, 296, no. 137). Sometimes the appearance of continuity can be deceptive. Caisteal nan Con, which stands on the promontory at Killundine on Mull, sits on top of the remains of a prehistoric fort. It is unlikely that there was continuous occupation, despite the local tradition that it was a hunting-lodge associated with the nearby Aros Castle, itself a residence of the Lords of the Isles. The site was probably chosen anew for its natural defensive properties by Allan M'Ean vic Ewin MacLean, who is recorded as tacksman of Killundine in 1671 and 1675 (iii, 37, 190–1, no. 337).

The practice of building on man-made crannogs or on natural islands persisted well into the early modern period, and many such structures are marked on Timothy Pont's Map, drawn around 1590 (i, 19; ii, 20; iii, 26–7; v, 38; vi, 32–3; vii, 23). When smaller kin-groups with few surplus resources were seeking a place of safety, water provided natural protection against raiding parties. The kindreds could only erect minimal fortifications, such as simple defensive walls, because of the cost and labour involved. This was apparently the reasoning of the MacQuarries in the late medieval period, when they built Dùn Bàn on the small island of Ulva, off Mull (iii, 202, no. 341). Similarly, in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century the MacCorquodales of Phantilands constructed a fortress on Loch Tromlee (ii, 212, no. 289). As late as the seventeenth or eighteenth century, new buildings and a perimeter wall were constructed on Eilean Mhic Iain, in Loch Lossit, Islay (v, 153–4, no. 304). Most of the crannogs and island dwellings are found on inland lochs, above all on Loch Awe, where an underwater survey identified twenty crannogs (ii, 94, no. 198). However, such sites can occasionally be found on sea-lochs: for example, Eilean dà Ghallagain in West Loch Tarbert, where John, Lord of the Isles, granted a charter in 1455 (vii, 23, 303, no. 141). Although unspectacular and often difficult to identify today, these smaller fortifications played an extremely important part in Argyll's history.

Some of the most striking images of the West Highlands are those of the great stone castles of the magnates which occupy the opposite end of the scale of military architecture from the crannogs. From the middle of the twelfth century until the end of the seventeenth, a large proportion of the resources of the region, both economic and human, was devoted to the construction and repair of castles and other fortified houses. Argyll has over 130 such fortified dwellings and about seventy of them are substantial stone buildings. The outlines of Castle Stalker in Appin, Dunstaffnage in Lorn, Carrick in Cowal, Kilchurn at the top of Loch Awe,

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*Argyll Sasines*, ed. H. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1933–4), i, nos. 225, 355, 361–2; ii, nos. 88, 1468, 1492.

<sup>16</sup> Recent work on the Campbells of Craignish by Dr Stephen Boardman would support that suggestion.

Skipness in Kintyre, Duart on Mull, Duntrune on Loch Crinan, and numerous others, are familiar from picture postcards. For many people they convey the essence of the Highland past.

In quality and quantity the Argyll castles far outstrip those found in the northern Highlands and Islands, beyond the Point of Ardnamurchan.<sup>17</sup> This preponderance reflects the immense strategic importance of the region as a boundary between Scotland and Ireland, and between the Lordship of the Isles and the Lowlands of Scotland. It also indicates Argyll's greater prosperity and ready access to Lowland markets for its products. This does not mean, however, that cash was used to pay for the construction of the castles, which were usually erected by a magnate using local labour and materials. The exceptions were some of the royal castles, such as Tarbert, Loch Fyne, where the building accounts for the 1325–6 repairs are recorded in the *Exchequer Rolls* (i, 182–4, no. 316), and some of the seventeenth-century constructions.<sup>18</sup>

Although broadly similar in style and technology to the rest of Scotland, castle-building within Argyll exhibits important regional variations. In particular, the county contains an unusually large number of hall-houses, such as those found at Aros Castle, Mull (iii, 173–7, no. 333) and in the first stage of Skipness Castle, Kintyre (i, 165–8, no. 314). There are also an interesting group of mottes in Cowal, in Glendaruel, Strachur, Dunoon and Achadunan (vii, 19, 537, notes 51–2; vii, 211, 213–4, 237, 263–4, nos. 108, 109, 113, 117, 125), which can probably be linked to the increase of Stewart power in this region during the thirteenth century. As one would expect from the geographical proximity and the close links with Northern Ireland, Argyll castle-building shows similarities to Irish styles and technology, and there are a number of close parallels with Irish castles, such as those provided for Carrick Castle, which can be compared to Athenay, Co. Galway, Grenan, Co. Kilkenny, and Kindlestown, Co. Wicklow (vii, 538, note 59).

The period from the middle of the twelfth century to c.1330 saw the first major phase of castle-building, with thirty-two buildings, including twenty major stone castles. This phase was largely concentrated in the strategically important areas, first that of the Firth of Lorn and Sound of Mull, and second that around the Clyde Estuary. People are frequently surprised to discover that the earliest surviving 'new' stone castle in Scotland lies by Loch Sween in Knapdale (vii, 245–59, no. 119). Castle Sween (which is located outside the Lorn and Clyde areas) was probably begun towards the end of the twelfth century by Suibhne, who gave his name to the MacSweens, one of the dominant families in the central Middle Ages in southern Argyll. The quadrangular enclosure of Castle Sween is unusual, and has no exact contemporary parallel. It is thought to be a rectangular version of the circular shell-keep of the type found in the earliest phase of Rothesay Castle on Bute, built at a slightly later date by the Stewarts.

The next period of castle-building (c.1330–c.1550) saw a different

<sup>17</sup> I owe many of the following points to discussions with John Dunbar, a former Secretary to the Royal Commission, and to his illuminating paper on 'Castles in the West Highlands and Islands' given at the Coll Conference, May 1993.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Barcaldine Castle built by Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy (ii, 176–81, no. 279).

pattern emerge, with some remodelling of the larger strongholds and a marked increase in building medium and smaller ones: such as Moy Castle, built by the MacLeans of Lochbuie (iii, 217–27, no. 346); Dunollie Castle, built by the MacDougalls (ii, 194–8, no. 286) after the loss of Dunstaffnage; and the bishop of Argyll's castle at Saddell, constructed in about 1508 (i, 161–5, no. 313). Not to be outdone by the rival Lochbuie branch of their clan, the MacLeans of Duart added a tower to make Duart Castle one of the biggest and most impressive castles in the region (iii, 191–200, no. 339)!

Argyll's political situation and the region's struggles for power are reflected both in the location and the chronology of castle-building. Changes in ownership can reveal the patterns of expansion and contraction of the various clans and kin-groups. One method of gaining control over an area was to dominate the lines of communication, whether on land or at sea. Thus the Lordship of the Isles was held together by the sea lanes. This is demonstrated by the position of its triangle of castles — Dunivaig, Islay (v, 268–75, no. 403); Dunaverty, Mull of Kintyre (i, 157–9, no. 309); and, later, Dunluce, Co. Antrim, Ireland — on the key routes connecting the Hebridean Islands, the mainland of Argyll, and the MacDonald lands of Antrim in northern Ireland. But the MacDonald Lords of the Isles felt sufficiently secure not to fortify excessively their principal base at Finlaggan in Islay (v, 275–81, no. 404).<sup>19</sup>

As with all the major castles, the *Inventories* provide comprehensive coverage of each architectural phase, a coverage which often calls for changes or modifications in the established views based upon MacGibbon and Ross.<sup>20</sup> Separate historical notes trace the different castle owners and the major events connected with the sites. In the case of Castle Sween this even includes a literary reference to the Gaelic poem in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* which described the sending of the fleet against Castle Sween, and spoke of the site as 'a pleasant anchorage in the bosom of Knapdale' (vii, 258, 551, notes 11, 12; no. 117). Numerous details are provided about the castles, which are often most revealing. Everything can be found — from the profiles of the mouldings at Dunderarve, Loch Fyne, (vii, 269, no. 126), to the numerous outbuildings at Ardtornish, Morvern (iii, 171–3, no. 332), to the gun-loops at Gylen Castle, Kerrara, (ii, 221, no. 291), to a discussion of the north-west latrine tower at Skipness (i, 170, no. 314), to the view from Dùn Athad, Islay, from which the Antrim coast and the Mull of Kintyre can be seen on a clear day (v, 264–5, no. 401).

One recurring theme in the discussion of the castles is the crucial importance of water both for defence and for access. There are the spectacular 'sea castles', such as the twin fortifications on the Treshnish Islands of Cairn na Burgh Mor and Cairn na Burgh Beg, which were used as royal strongholds by the crowns of Norway and Scotland from the thirteenth century (ii, 184–90, no. 335); or Dùn Chonaill, in the

<sup>19</sup> The continuing excavation of this site has furnished much additional information about the Lords of the Isles, some of which has already been presented by David Caldwell in preliminary papers on Finlaggan; cf. Caldwell and Ewart, 'Finlaggan and the Lordship of the Isles'.

<sup>20</sup> D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1887–92).

Garvellachs, midway between Mull and Jura (v, 265, no. 402). It is curious that landing from a boat is not particularly easy for either of these sites in certain types of weather or states of the tide.

Large numbers of the castles in Argyll, such as Mingary in Ardnamurchan, are located by the coast where they command the sea-routes – in the case of Mingary those through the Sound of Mull (iii, 209–17, no. 345). The strategic importance of dominating sea-borne communication is obvious in a region where water provided the principal highways for the region. In many instances the main access to a castle was from the sea, as at Dùn Ara, Mull, or, as it still is today, to Glensanda, on Loch Linnhe (iii, 200–5, nos. 340, 342). Wherever possible, the *Inventories* identify the boat-landing attached to the castles, for example at Dunivaig, Islay (v, 268–275, no. 403). Inland castles also utilised water transport and were, therefore, frequently sited on freshwater lochs. The Campbells kept a specialist family of shipwrights on Loch Awe, who would have supplied the galleys which plied between their castles at Kilchurn and Innis Chonnel at the opposite ends of that long loch (ii, 223–40, no. 292).

The evidence from the charters indicates that, certainly for the Campbells and probably for other clans as well, holding castles and providing galley-service very often went together. For example, on 27 October 1571 the fifth earl of Argyll granted a feu-charter to the captain of Dunoon Castle in return for the service of a ten-oared galley (vii, pp. 273–6, 551, note 8). Some coastal castles had adequate anchorages, but none could rival the excellent harbour in the sheltered bay in Loch Etive next to the castle at Dunstaffnage (ii, 198). Keeping a galley permanently on station at a castle could be a tricky operation. Although all the coastal strongholds had a boat-landing, this did not necessarily mean that all possessed a safe anchorage, let alone a good, all-weather harbour. At Skipness Castle, Kintyre (i, 165–78, no. 314), there is a boat-landing at the bay, Brann a' Phuirt, which is over 600 metres from the castle and faces south-west into the prevailing wind which blows up the Sound of Kilbrannan. It could only take boats with draughts of no more than 1.2 metres and less than 9 metres in length. This raises the question of whether Skipness could have had a proper galley on station or (as is more likely) would have had to signal across to Lochranza Castle on Arran for naval support.<sup>21</sup>

One particular merit of the *Inventories* is the light they throw upon the wider relationship of the Argyll castles to the naval and military power of the Scottish Crown, the Lords of the Isles and other major kin-groups in the West like the Campbells, which has not been fully explored by historians. In these volumes the material evidence from the Argyll castles is now available as a basis for future work. Although not immediately obvious, the employment of artillery in and against those castles is directly connected to the sea. With the poor quality or absence of roads within this region until the mid-eighteenth century at the earliest, large pieces of artillery had to be transported by boat. This was one reason why royal expeditions sent to subdue the area by force came by sea during the late medieval and early modern periods. When, in the 1490s, James IV devoted so much time and trouble to reduce this part of his kingdom to

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Mrs Ann Kahane for clarification of these points.

obedience, he relied upon his two great military passions, his fleet and his cannons.

The transportation of artillery continued to pose extreme logistical difficulties, and it remains problematical whether heavy pieces were actually used in warfare in the West Highlands and Islands. The material evidence provided in the *Inventories* gives an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, there are numerous examples of gun-loops being incorporated into existing structures or built into later additions to a castle, as in the tower-house of Tarbert Castle, Kintyre (i, 179–84, no. 316, especially fig. 174). On the other hand, the actual fortifications were rather primitive and there is little evidence of coherent systems of defence with outworks against artillery attack (vii, 22). An interesting exception can be found in the unfinished artillery battery at Breachacha Castle on Coll, which was probably put in place in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (iii, 183–4, no. 334). Attempts at speedy protection were made in the southern Hebrides during Sir James MacDonald's rebellion in 1615: fortifications were constructed on Loch an Sgoltaire, Colonsay, Loch Gorm, Islay, and at Dunivaig (v, 274, 281–3, nos. 403, 405, 406).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, a bastioned trace was dug near Campbeltown in 1639 to counter an expected invasion from the earl of Antrim (i, 184, no. 317). All these examples are very late, which suggests that the artillery and fortifications which were at the heart of the Military Revolution of early modern Europe had a belated and limited impact in the Highlands.

Most Argyll castles retained the traditional perpendicular wall, since there was no challenge from artillery to act as a catalyst for change. Before the seventeenth century, there is scant direct evidence that castles in Argyll were seriously damaged by cannon fire.<sup>23</sup> The destructive capacity of artillery was first fully demonstrated in the wars of the 1640s, at Castle Toward and Ascog (vii, 23, 212–13, 297–302, nos. 111, 139). More spectacular still was the obliteration of the castle at Eilean Dearg, blown up during the rebellion in 1685 of the ninth earl of Argyll (vii, 282–3, no. 129).

The material evidence indicates that, in general, hand-held firearms were extensively employed, but that artillery played little part in the type of small-scale, mobile warfare of raids and reprisals which was routinely conducted in the West Highlands and Islands throughout the later medieval and early modern periods. The possession of large cannons, by the crown or by their agents, the Campbells, was a potent threat in itself — but more a psychological than an actual weapon. Not until the 1640s, and again in 1685–6, was the dramatic effect of prolonged cannon fire upon castles unprotected by bastions or earthworks demonstrated. This signalled that the age of the medieval castle was finally over in the West Highlands and Islands — a century and a half after much of Europe had reconstructed its defensive fortifications!

This belated realisation of the significance of artillery is less remarkable than the renaissance of old-style building which had taken place

<sup>22</sup> In February 1615 the fortifications hastily thrown up at Dunivaig survived for only three days in the face of the bombardment of Sir Oliver Lambert's cannon (v, 274).

<sup>23</sup> A 16th-century cannon ball was found in the wall at Castle Tioram, just across the Argyll border in Moidart, Inverness-shire.



throughout Argyll between c.1550–1700, forming the last period of castle-building. Many of the principal castles in Argyll have additions or modifications dating from this period, and 85% of the castles continued to be occupied until 1700 and often beyond. Fortified dwellings and tower-houses were built by smaller landowners who were moving into the ‘stone-building classes’ for the first time. As seen above, crannogs and islands were often used for this purpose.

The shift from defensive fortification to family residence reached its conclusion in the abandonment of the tower-house style and the emergence of the elegant homes of the eighteenth century. The delightful early-Georgian Airds House, by Loch Etive, (ii, 244–5, no. 304) might have been modelled upon the south front of Marble Hill House, Twickenham (1724–9). Barbreck House, dated 1790, has some fine rooms on the first floor, including the dining-room and its plaster ceiling with elaborate military trophies and a frieze of garlands and urns (vii, 25, 320–6, no. 155). The most famous aristocratic rebuilding in the eighteenth century was done for the dukes of Argyll at Inveraray, and in volume VII this receives its own sections, dealing with the model burgh and with Inveraray Castle estate (vii, 370–454, nos. 184–210). The nineteenth century’s taste for Gothic is reflected in David Hamilton’s Castle Toward (vii, 327–9, no. 158), built in 1820, complete with a crenellated, turreted tower, and in the slightly earlier Torrisdale Castle, Kintyre, probably designed by James Gillespie Graham along the same lines as Edmonston Castle, Lanarkshire (i, 192, no. 337).

The relatively sparse remains of the vernacular buildings used by those further down the social scale have a more distinctive regional identity than the aristocratic architecture. The settlement of Auchindrain contains a range of such buildings, nearly all of which date from between about 1770 and 1840, though many have been reconstructed (vii, 457–64, no. 213). It is now a Museum of Country Life, and offers a clear view of an agricultural township as it would have operated in the Highlands of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many other township sites listed in the *Inventory* have been abandoned, such as Lurabus, on the Oa peninsula in Islay (v, 312–4, no. 424). The township of Bourblaige in Ardnamurchan (iii, 238–9, no. 364) was probably deserted shortly before 1829. It contains the single-walled houses which were usual throughout Northern Argyll and Mull, though the well-known, double-walled ‘black house’, so characteristic of the Outer Hebrides, can be found on Tiree (iii, 41). The Bourblaige houses are small rectangular buildings of dry-stone construction with round ends and normally without internal partition walls. The cruck-framed hip-roof was thatched with either heather or fern held down by heather ropes and anchor stones (iii, 40). Since none of the buildings has stone-built fireplaces and chimneys, the inhabitants possibly preferred, like the laird of Colonsay’s tenants in the 1830s, to place ‘their fire on the floor on the usual pretext that the *wee things* may be able to get round it’ (v, 43).

During the summer months, most inhabitants of the townships throughout Argyll would move up to the temporary shieling huts in the upland pastures where the black cattle were taken to fatten. Only a selection of shieling sites have been included in the *Inventory* (ii, 267–8, no. 337; vii, 469–70, no. 219). The site with the largest number of huts has



been found in Islay (v, 41–2, 314, no. 425). The importance of transhumance and the way in which it affected the social and religious, as well as the agricultural, life of Highland communities is being investigated in much greater detail.<sup>24</sup> This forms part of the wider debate about pre-crofting agricultural practices and especially the timing of the introduction of the runrig system. Investigating the changes which took place to the whole farming landscape of the West Highlands needs extensive field work and sophisticated analysis.<sup>25</sup> But the surveys and the documentary base provided by the *Inventory* for many of the farming townships in Argyll certainly offer a good basis for future studies.

The cattle trade, which was such a vital component in the rural economy, was also responsible for the major change in the region's communications with the creation of the through drove roads linking Argyll with the Lowlands. Some of these routes, together with the military roads constructed in the mid-eighteenth century, have been listed in the 'Transport' sections of the *Inventories* (vii, 512–14, 521–2, nos. 264, 274). These also include the many bridges, ranging from the prosaic clapper bridge, as at Achnamara (vii, 501–2, no. 254), to the tourists' delight, the 'Bridge over the Atlantic' at Clachan, Isle of Seil (ii, 294–5, no. 369). In the eighteenth century, the hard-working Commissioners of Supply constructed many bridges and improved the main routes through Argyll.<sup>26</sup> Their handiwork can be seen in the pleasing two-arched bridge at Kilmichael, Glassary, and on the 'Sliabh Gaoil' road through that rugged section of Knapdale (vii, 40, 505–6, no. 259). The most spectacular engineering feat in Argyll was the digging of the Crinan Canal, which was finally completed in November 1817 (vii, 506–10, no. 261).

The Crinan is heavily used today by the large numbers of yachtsmen who are rediscovering the delights of sailing in the varied, interesting and challenging waters of the West Highlands. They have replaced the small commercial vessels — in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries the 'puffers' of Para Handy and his ilk — which transported the vast majority of goods into and around Argyll. Most of the industrial sites were close to the water with access to the sea, such as Bonawe ironworks on Loch Etive (ii, 281–92, no. 362), the slate quarry at Easdale, Seil, (ii, 278–9, no. 356), or the ironworks which gave their name to Furnace on Loch Fyne (vii, 486–93, no. 239). Similar locations were usually found for the distilleries. Distilling is one of the older industries which continues to be of major economic significance today, especially on Islay. By the 1830s there were sixteen licensed distilleries on the island, eight of which were still commercially active in 1980, while the ruins of a ninth could be surveyed by the Commission (v, 323–5, no. 437).

Hints of the way heavy building materials were moved around the area in much earlier periods can be gained from other sections of the *Inventory*.

<sup>24</sup> E. Bil, *The Shieling* (Edinburgh, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> See the varied methodologies currently being employed by Professor Robert Dodgshon, and R. Dodgshon, 'West Highland chiefdoms, 1500–1745', in *Economy and Society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500–1939*, ed. R. Mitchison and P. Roebuck (Edinburgh, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> Lochgilphead, Argyll and Bute District Archives, Minute Book of the Commissioners of Supply, 1744–95, CO6/1/1/1; I am most grateful to Murdo Macdonald for allowing me to consult his transcript of these minutes.

Where it can be discovered, the source of the building material is recorded for individual items, such as churches or castles — for example, the monastery on Iona (iv, see index, under 'stone', 'thatching', 'timber' and 'wattle-work'), or the castle on Fraoch Eilean, Lorn (ii, 213, 216, no. 290). In *Monumental Sculpture* there is an appendix on the petrology of late medieval West Highland monuments which identifies the ten different types of rock used, the most important of which, calc-chlorite-albite-schist, was quarried at Doide, Loch Sween, before being carved by the craftsmen of the Iona, Kintyre or Oronsay schools. The Loch Awe school, possibly because it served more of an inland area, tended to rely on rock which could be found close to the site where the sculpture would remain (*Monumental Sculpture*, 195–200).

With such a variety of material to be found in the Argyll *Inventories* and the great diversity of physical environments, it can be difficult to appreciate the type of links which hold the region together and make it worthwhile to study as a whole in its own right, not just as part of the wider unit of the Highlands and Islands. One of the elements which bound Argyll together, from the later medieval period onwards, was the seemingly all-pervasive influence of the Campbells. This clan, with its myriad of branches, crops up all over the *Inventory*. The Campbells were renowned, to the point of notoriety, for their exploitation of written records. They meticulously preserved their charters and estate records, which could be used in defence of their own interests, as a check upon their tenants, or as a weapon against their enemies. However much they might have been hated at the time, they left mountains of paper to be preserved in the many Campbell archives, which are a godsend to historians and have been frequently consulted by the Royal Commission staff, as the footnotes demonstrate.<sup>27</sup>

The *Inventory* graphically demonstrates that the Campbells were not content merely to leave written proof of their power. They also left their mark directly upon the landscape of Argyll by their many building projects. This can be seen at all levels throughout the region from the county town to the castles and country houses and the villages, piers, bridges and estate cottages. Inveraray is dominated, as it always has been, by a castle, the seat of the head of Clan Campbell, the duke of Argyll. The present county town was built in the mid-eighteenth century as a model burgh by the third duke of Argyll, who moved the old settlement to permit the building of his new castle (vii, 370–454).<sup>28</sup> The fifth duke was as concerned with reconstructing the farming landscape, and built the steading at Maam as the showpiece of his agricultural improvements, opening it and Glen Shira to visitors (vii, 474–7, no. 224). This type of construction is what one would expect from one of the most important aristocratic families in the British state.

<sup>27</sup> The most important Campbell archives are those held by the duke of Argyll at Inveraray Castle, and the massive Breadalbane (Campbells of Glenorchy) collection in the Scottish Record Office, GD112, which has recently been fully catalogued. There are a number of smaller Campbell deposits in the Gifts and Deposits section of the Record Office, whilst other collections remain in private hands.

<sup>28</sup> I. G. Lindsay and M. Cosh, *Inveraray and the Dukes of Argyll* (Edinburgh, 1973).

What is more significant is the range of building by Campbell proprietors at the lower social levels. In Mid-Argyll and Cowal no less than two-thirds of the owners of property, listed in a 1751 roll as worth more than £25 valued rent, were named Campbell (vii, 24). This was the heartland of Campbell power, but the building enthusiasm of the clan is evident in many other parts of Argyll. It can be seen in an urban setting in the Town House of Campbeltown in Kintyre erected in 1758–60,<sup>29</sup> (i, 184–7, nos. 318–24) as well as in the planned village of Bowmore on Islay constructed by Campbell of Shawfield (v, 284–8, no. 408). In an earlier period, the Campbells concentrated on building castles, such as Duntrune or Kilberry (vii, 276–82, 289–92, nos. 128, 133).

Campbell was, and is, an extremely common name in Argyll, and at times there seems to be no escaping them! However, the monolithic nature of Campbell dominance in Argyll can be deceptive. Their homogeneity as a clan was unusual and of overwhelming significance in Scottish national politics throughout the later medieval and early modern periods. In a regional context, however, that internal cohesion should not be exaggerated: within Argyll, the Campbells were a diverse group of families, sometimes fighting each other, sometimes co-operating under the leadership of their chief. Yet, through their physical, material and documentary presence, the Campbells do give a focus for the region. This is not because they provide a neat, single, unifying factor, but because they have created and preserved much of the best material and documentary evidence which survives for the region. It constructs a window, not only into their own lives, but also into the lives of all their contemporaries within Argyll.

Since the start of this century, as the maps on the inside covers of their volumes show, the Royal Commission have produced *Inventories* for a number of the shires throughout the country. However, none has received the breadth and depth of coverage given to Argyll, the second largest county in Scotland. Eight large volumes, well over 2,500 pages and numerous drawings and plates offer a staggering range of information about this large portion of the Western Highlands and Islands. It is easy to take the comprehensive coverage of Argyll for granted. It is only when working on buildings outside Argyll that the full utility of the *Inventories* becomes apparent. Thus there is no simple way to check that the chapels found in parts of Inverness-shire or Ross, for example, have the same style of church building as those of their neighbours in northern Argyll, whereas comparisons between Lorn, Kintyre or Tiree can easily be made. The reports provide a unique opportunity for researchers in a wide range of fields. Argyll has a research resource which is second to none, and must be the envy of every other part of Scotland.

One obvious way in which the *Inventory* has already become the foundation for more research is the way in which it is used as the starting-point for many articles in Argyll's local history journal, *The Kist*. It also provides a guide for the historical and archaeological field trips of the Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Mid-Argyll. In this context, it is particularly unfortunate that the pricing policy of HMSO has placed the

<sup>29</sup> The steeple bell in the Town House commemorates Alexander Campbell, provost from September 1778 (i, 187).

volumes, especially the £120 of volume VII, outside the reach of all but the wealthiest or most committed individuals. It is a poor return to all the local people who have contributed so much to this series that they cannot afford to buy what they have helped to create and what they will, and do, use so enthusiastically. There would surely have been more purchasers for sensibly priced volumes. A clearer marketing strategy for individual volumes, such as the specialist volume IV on Iona, or a reprint of volume I, much in demand particularly in Kintyre itself, could have increased sales. Considering the present policy of producing beautifully illustrated paperbacks on certain categories of monuments,<sup>30</sup> it is a nothing short of a disgrace that the Argyll *Inventories* were so prohibitively priced.

Although the Argyll series will undoubtedly be consulted on library shelves, this is a terrible missed opportunity. Most of the value of the volumes to scholars and students will be lost if they are simply examined as a reference work in libraries. These are books to be dipped into or browsed through. More importantly, these volumes should accompany trips to see the monuments they describe so well. Argyll's rich material evidence is best studied 'on the ground', and the *Inventories* provide a great incentive to go to view the monuments in their physical settings.

One of the main prerequisites for a regional history is an accurate 'sense of place'. This includes an appreciation of how, over the centuries, man has inter-reacted with the local environment. Through the evidence provided by the Royal Commission on the surviving monuments, it is possible to trace much of man's impact upon the landscape of Argyll. On such solid foundations a new regional history of the 'enduring heartland', in all its complexity and diversity, can now be written.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., the latest addition, R. Fawcett, *Scottish Abbeys and Priories* (HMSO, 1994), which retails at £14.99.